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RUEHHM/AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY 4941

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SENSITIVE
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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [VM](#)

SUBJECT: CENTRAL HIGHLANDS AUTHORITIES CONTINUE TO ARREST MONTAGNARD
DEMONSTRATORS

REF: A) HCMC 447 B) HCMC 480 C) HCMC 674

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Six ethnic minority "instigators" of mass demonstrations were arrested by authorities in Gia Lai province this month, according to a recent government news report. Post contacts confirmed the arrests, but say only two now remain in custody. While official reports call the detainees Front Unifie de Lutte des Races Opprimees (FULRO) separatists, post contacts continue to cite land issues as the reason for the April unrest. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Cong An (Police) newspaper on July 4 reported that Gia Lai provincial authorities arrested Montagnard Nam Ty and five of his "henchmen" for their role in April demonstrations (Ref B). Reliable post contacts confirmed the arrests but could not ascertain the names of Nam Ty's colleagues. On July 22, a pastor contact reported that only two alleged "instigators" remained in custody. Post contacts are hesitant to pursue their inquiries further, given the sensitive nature of the issue.

¶3. (SBU) The authorities have accused Ty of inciting 20 people to "continue demonstrating through August." Cong An described Ty and his fellow Montagnards as "FULRO instigators" who had tried to "deceive ignorant people about the history, human rights, law, and maps of the Degar Republic." Front Unifie de Lutte des Races Opprimees (FULRO), a paramilitary separatist group that sought the establishment of an independent state for ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands, laid down their arms in 1992, but former members remain active via overseas groups. The Cong An article said the Gia Lai People's Committee Chairman feted the Province's Political Affairs Division and awarded it 10 million VND (600 USD) in recognition of their work on the investigation and arrests.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: While the situation in the Central Highlands has calmed considerably following the April unrest, these recent arrests show authorities are continuing to arrest individuals they consider ringleaders of "Degar Republic separatism." Post contacts, on the other hand, suggest that the demonstrations had more to do with land appropriation abuses by political insiders rather than FULRO-formented rebellion (Ref A). While land rights protests and the resulting crack-down on poor peasants are a country-wide phenomenon (ref C), discontent over land appropriation policies in the Central Highlands is complicated by a racial and cultural dimension. Corrupt land grabs by Kinh-majority officials are particularly provocative to ethnic minorities who have already seen their traditional lifestyle and land come under pressure from large-scale internal migration and state-sponsored economic development projects in recent years.

5.(U)This cable was coordinated with Embassy Hanoi.

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